

The LENINIST

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Vote against Poole

AS WE predicted in the last issue of *The Leninist*, Poole and the Nupe bureaucrats have sued for peace. Militant rank and file ambulance workers in London expressed their outrage by taking strike action alongside their comrades in Merseyside. However, whether or not the anger felt by the vast majority at Poole's sellout can be turned into a 'no' vote, let alone into victory, is very much open to question. The main problem is that, although no one can find a good word for Poole, there exists neither an alternative leadership nor an alternative strategy. As things stand, it looks as if there will be a very reluctant and very bitter 'yes' vote.

While we certainly urge ambulance workers to reject Poole's Acas deal, the key question for militants after March 15 is therefore to learn the lessons of the last five months and develop an alternative leadership. It is certainly beyond doubt that the dispute has thrown up many invaluable lessons, not just for an alternative leadership of ambulance workers, but for the working class as a whole.

So let us look at the lessons. For most ambulance workers the deal only offers around 1.5% on top of the original offer – not much for those who have lost thousands of pounds in wages during the dispute. The fact, crucial for ambulance workers, that there is no pay formula, shows the inability of new realism to deliver what workers need.

Poole has not "conducted an exemplary campaign" (*The New Worker*, February 23 1990), nor does his new realism represent the unions' eventual conversion to the "sound-byte politics of the 80s" (*Marxism Today*, March 1990). It is the ambulance workers, not Poole, who commanded public sympathy and it is they, not Poole, who organised street collections worth an estimated £4 million. And despite all the *Morning Star's* hype about his deal having "driven through" the government's "artificial 6.5% barrier" (editorial, February 24 1990), Poole has, as we all know, in reality utterly failed the ambulance workers; he has betrayed them and squandered the mass support which they won. Even he now reluctantly admits that the lack of a pay formula is a "major problem". The heroic ambulance workers now know, after five months, what new realism produces.

What new realism means in essence is old fashioned class collaborationism. The union bureaucracy looks not to serving the workers in dispute but to the Labour Party. This means abusing the anger and determination of workers in dispute for Kinnock's petty electoral ends. He and his ilk turn the workers' just cause into a



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convenient tool to snipe at Thatcher in the parliamentary talking shop, and then dump them when they have served their purpose. The indecent haste with which Kinnock lined up with Thatcher to recommend the deal ought to dispel any illusions ambulance workers may have had about which side he and his party are on.

Willis and the TUC are no better. In the wake of the proposed ambulance workers' deal Willis offered to "curb pay claims" in return for a "mechanism for wage setting" (*Financial Times*, February 28 1990). Given that the "wage setting" cooperation between the TUC and the Callaghan Labour government led in the late 70s to the biggest drop this century in working class living standards, given the TUC's unwillingness to go beyond its 15 minutes of "dignified protest" on January 30, its total failure to deliver real solidarity in strikes from the miners to the printers to the seafarers, given its double dealing on the introduction of the slave labour ET scheme, it should be quite clear that militant ambulance workers should place no trust at all in the TUC.

Socialist Workers Party calls for the TUC to do this and for the TUC to do that, Workers Revolutionary Party (*News Line*) calls for the TUC to "get off its knees" and "call the general strike" are little more than diversions. Militants must fight for class action with or without the TUC. What the

new realist politics of Nupe, the TUC and the Labour Party etc, demands is the organisation of a militant minority alternative leadership. This is without doubt a crucial question facing our class, a question brought home forcibly during the ambulance workers' dispute.

Over the last five months many outstanding potential rank and file leaders have emerged. The major problem has been the failure to come together and hammer out a strategy which wrested the running of the dispute from Poole and the Nupe bureaucrats and which drew other sections, particularly the 800,000 other healthworkers, into the struggle. This is still a burning necessity.

We still await the final outcome of the dispute with hope, but even if this particular battle is lost, the war most certainly is not. The pay round for other healthworkers is about to begin. Forces must be organised for the battles ahead. Action committees consisting of recallable delegates from all sections of healthworkers, cutting across union divides, are vital. Militants must agitate to ensure maximum participation and counter the trade union bureaucracy, which is increasingly recognised by rank and file workers not as a 'simplistic invention' of the 'ultra-left' but an all too real dead hand on all class struggles.

The lack of a pay formula makes it essential that rank and file ambulance workers start organising now

for when this deal runs out and fight the Tory plans to put out work to the private sector, which will inevitably mean even worse pay and conditions than exist at the moment. Against the efforts of the Tory government and the trade union bureaucracy to foster sectionalism, militants must fight for a united front of all health workers.

Ambulance workers tapped into a massive reservoir of discontent with the Tory government and Thatcherite economics. True, in general things did not go beyond sympathy. But sympathy is not to be scoffed at (although those such as the SWP, who could essentially offer nothing more in terms of strategy than Poole, deserve scorn for their overemphasis on ambulance workers as carers rather than workers). What mattered above all was how to get the class as a whole to go beyond sympathy money in the buckets to solidarity in the form of strike action.

Since the miners' Great Strike a vital auxiliary to any important industrial dispute are the support groups – rejected at the time by the Revolutionary Communist Party, but not by the class. They are now part of the modern proletarian tradition in Britain and came to the fore during the ambulance workers' dispute. But as well as providing splendid financial and moral assistance, these support groups have massive potential. Because they unite all militants, all working class forces, they are in a very real sense embryonic organs

of future generalised working class struggle (and eventually state power). Every effort must be made to transform support groups into councils of action and unite them at a national level into an all-Britain council of action. Such a body would really mobilise the class and shift the balance of class forces against the bosses – and that would open up the road to genuine fundamental social change.

In their own way ambulance workers indicated that this is what they want: a society run by the workers themselves, not a money-bagged elite; a society based on human values, not on private wealth. The germ of this could be seen in the attitude towards emergency cover. Instead of falling for the 'all out and bugger the consequences' line advocated by certain Labourite Trotskyite groups like *Workers Power*, the ambulance workers showed their responsibility to the class as a whole, ie the population at large, by organising their own emergency cover.

During the nurses' dispute in 1988, we argued against those left groups which called for no cover. We recognised that this was offering control of a crucial area to the bosses, which they would use as a strike breaking weapon. The call for emergency cover under workers' control was shown as correct by ambulance workers who occupied stations and found all sorts of novel ways of dealing with this problem. Yet again, workers went way beyond the narrow economism so prevalent within the petty bourgeois left and showed that through the logic of their own class struggle they have an almost instinctive tendency towards wanting to run society.

So, there are many positive lessons from the last five heroic months which must be built upon for the future, not only by ambulance workers but by all workers. Talk by the SWP of a "downturn" and attempts by the RCP to dismiss the rising class struggle as "press hype" have yet again been exposed by the workers themselves. The working class is on the move again, the period of defeats is giving way to a period of struggle. With this and the poll tax, a profound balance of payments crisis and rising inflation, the Tories are in deep trouble. Clarke is in no position to gloat in the way his predecessors could in the struggles involving the miners, printers, seafarers and dockers.

Poole might succeed in getting his deal accepted but we are sure that ambulance workers can – if they take on board the politics of class war – bounce back, re-armed and part of a united offensive which can really take on the Tories and lead the way to a future society where the health of our class is decided by need, not profit.

Gavin Kyle



Central Organ of the Communist
Party of Great Britain (*The Leninist*)

UNDOUBTEDLY the Sandinistas led a hugely popular revolution against Somoza, a hated dictator who bled white the country and all classes; for many years the FSLN even enjoyed the support of sections of the bourgeoisie. But the world's counterrevolutionary centre, the USA, had no love of any sort of genuine revolution. It offers massive aid to shore up the 'revolutions' in Eastern Europe but imposed terrible hardships on Nicaragua through civil war and economic sanction.

In the end though, defeat came not because the people voted 55.2% to 40.8% with their "stomachs not their heads," as Sandinista militants are saying. Defeat was the product of Gorbachevism in the Soviet Union and the political programme of the Sandinistas themselves.

Nicaragua was one of those 'hot spots' the traitor Gorbachev was willing to trade away in order to appease US imperialism. The Nicaraguan masses had no illusions about the world balance of forces "decisively shifting in favour of socialism". And after seeing Grenada and Panama go down to US invasion they must have feared the same fate. They certainly felt isolated, and isolation saps confidence. The negative world situation, not least the democratic counterrevolutions across Eastern Europe resulting from Gorbachevism, encouraged the FSLN to agree to one US inspired compromise after another, including playing by the rules of bourgeois democracy.

The FSLN is not a Marxist-Leninist party, as the US state department propaganda claims. It is made up of a broad range of forces from genuine partisans of the working class to left social democrats. But its main strand is left nationalism. As a result it lacks revolutionary vision and ruthlessness. So instead of a Bolshevik style dispersal of the National Assembly, the FSLN meekly accepts democratic counterrevolution. There will be a high price to pay!

From the beginning the Sandinista revolution was far less thoroughgoing than it could have been and needed to be. It was not just that some 60% of industry remained in the hands of the pro-UNO capitalist class. What was crucial was the nature of the state and state power.

Nicaragua was never an example of the dictatorship of the proletariat, where the whole people is armed and organs of proletarian struggle are transformed into organs of proletarian class rule. The 100,000 strong army and police were, and continue for the moment at least, to be based on the former guerilla fighters of the FSLN. But there is every reason to believe Daniel Ortega when he promised that the armed forces will act as professionals (ie, as a bourgeois institution) and serve Mrs Violeta Chamorro and UNO.

UNO does not have the two-thirds majority necessary to unilaterally alter the Sandinista constitution and Sandinista appointees will maintain a majority in the supreme court for a number of years. Yet the constitution is in essence a parliamentary constitution, not a soviet type one. February's elections were fought according to the rules of bourgeois democracy, not soviet democracy. Workers were atomised in geographic constituencies, not united in production units. This was a fatal flaw.

Although the situation is far from stable — the contras have still to disband and the handover of governmental powers is not due until April 25 — as things stand at the moment the gains of the 11 year Sandinista revolution look set to be thrown into reverse.

With Panama and Nicaragua under their belts US officials are saying 'two down, one to go'. They now want the head of Fidel Castro — the "Ceausescu of the Caribbean," as the US ambassador to the UN human rights commission calls him. Cuba has shown the world countless examples of exemplary proletarian internationalism. Now the world's proletariat must rally *unconditionally* to the defence of Cuba. The march of reaction must be halted!

The Editor

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LETTERS

Forward comrades

The Central Committee of the Communist Labour Party, speaking on behalf of our Party and class, take this opportunity to congratulate the comrades of the Communist Party of Great Britain (*The Leninist*) on their successful conference.

Antagonistic, qualitatively new productive forces, within internationalised production and exchange, are polarising the world proletariat against the exploiters. The objective basis for world revolution is consolidating.

Your struggle for the consolidation of a Marxist-Leninist Party is a leading and critical element in the scattered but objectively united internal struggle for the reaffirmation of scientific socialism.

Forward, comrades, to the unity of the revolutionary proletariat.

Nelson Peery
Chairman of the Central Committee

Communist Labor Party of the
United States of North America

Major step

On behalf of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkey, we would like to convey our fraternal greetings to you on your 4th Conference of the Leninists of the CPGB.

Your conference convened at a very definite turning point of the struggle of the working class and communist movement. As a world wide tendency, counterrevolution and reaction have been on the rise. The socialist countries and their communist parties have crumbled and disintegrated as they were asked to pay the price of accumulated mistakes they have committed in theory and practice.

The Gorbachev line, which does nothing but denounce communist ideas and gradually disperse the socialist gains of the working class, has shown its true face in the counterrevolutionary plot in Romania and in the bloody suppression of the nationalist aspirations of Azerbaijan. The apparent collaboration with the imperialist circles which began in the name of peace, has brought bloody war into the Soviet Union.

This process has a major impact on the revolutionary and communist movement across the world. Many seemingly mighty communist parties of Europe have already disintegrated. As the effects of this counterrevolutionary wave settles in the consciousness of millions of workers, and as the imperialist propaganda machinery billows out the message 'socialism does not work', the task of true communists in every part of the world becomes more and more difficult.

A period of attrition is on the agenda. The task for us will be to defend and uphold socialist and communist ideas in a prolonged and costly battle and to raise communism to be the vanguard force of the working class once again.

This battle cannot be won if we do not develop Marxist ideas within their own logic with the accumulated knowledge and experience of the last hundred years. Therefore ideological struggle will be the paramount task of

the communists all around the world.

This battle requires a regeneration of the idea and practice of proletarian internationalism. Today in every party and movement there are many comrades and groups who oppose this treacherous distortion of Marxism. Many of them will no longer be together with their 'official' parties but many cannot find an answer to the main question of what is to be done. Revolutionary communist ideas must reach them.

This battle requires a cadre which is able to sustain loss without losing its direction, which is able to work on the acute tasks of the day without any hesitation, which is toughened and disciplined enough to defend its trenches under left and right bourgeois ideological attacks, which is ready to attack even under the threat of severe backlash.

We believe your 4th Conference has been a major step to prepare your organisation and cadres for the coming battle. We wish you every success in the struggle of the coming years.

Long live proletarian internationalism!

Long live communism!
Central Executive Committee
Communist Party of Turkey

It's Reformism

I'm writing to comment on the front page article of your February 5 issue, which I believe to be profoundly reformist in character. To keep the letter as short as possible, I'm confining my comments to it.

In essence you equate the election/formation of a non-proletarian government with the end of workers' power within the state. This is parliamentarianism in its crudest form and is reminiscent of the announcement by the Chinese Communist Party in the 1950s that the USSR ceased to be 'socialist' as a consequence of Khrushchev's 'secret speech' denouncing the crimes of Stalin. If proletarian rule can be overthrown purely by the implementation of a few bourgeois property laws, then why can't the opposite happen? If the working class do nothing but utilise a 'hang-over' from bourgeois state power, then why can't they use this to bring about their own rule in a capitalist state? This is what the BRS has argued for a generation and is nowadays most eloquently (if such a phrase can be used concerning Ted Grant) proposed by the Militant group.

A bourgeois government and bourgeois property laws in a workers' state are indeed contradictions. The point is, though, that they are contradictions still to be resolved. Perestroika-type reforms and the implementation of 'market planning' do not in themselves constitute the rule of the bourgeoisie, even though they do generate dangerous conditions whereby a proto-bourgeoisie (formed in part by former Communist Party bureaucrats) can gain strength and sustenance for their future power bid. The bourgeoisie have yet to take state power in states such as Poland and Hungary. The counterrevolution will not be a peaceful event (if it comes). I use the word 'event' because this will not be some 'process'. Whether the working class will be agreeable to it is yet to be tested.

The army, police etc are defenders of the workers' state and can't simply be utilised by the bourgeoisie without smashing the state

apparatus. It is a basic Marxist concept that the state is in essence 'armed bodies of men'. The fact that it is a tenet of Marxism does not, of course, make it correct; but more thought as to what you wish to replace it with should be given before you throw it out. If these armed bodies can change sides at the stroke of a pen or the wave of an IMF cheque then it doesn't say much for the rule of any class, does it?

You're correct to pillory the left for their tailing of various Eastern European reformist or counterrevolutionary movements, but the main problem with your analysis is its defeatism (a defeatism neatly summed up by your headline to the article). What you say is that the working class is already defeated, when, in fact, the battle is yet to be fought. Presumably you take your analysis to its logical conclusion and believe there's nothing now worth defending in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Hungary (your list). If Modrow is defeated in the forthcoming elections then I assume you will add the DDR to your list. On what basis, then, could you oppose German capitalist reunification? This is the danger of your position, arising from an identification of the form of government with the form of state.
Millenin
London

Loggerheads

In the February 5 article entitled 'It's counterrevolution', Jack Conrad says, "Poland can no longer be considered a socialist state in any sense of the word; nor for that matter can Hungary, Czechoslovakia or Romania"; and further, "what leads us to this conclusion is not the dwindling percentage of industry in state hands but the political programme and perspectives of those at the head of the state".

If we compare this with an extract from the supplement 'Which Road?' part four (also by Jack Conrad), which says (regarding an election in a socialist Britain), "If the Communist Party found itself defeated it would of course respect the result. But in this case there would be no question of reverting back to capitalism, such a fear under the established Soviet system would be an utter absurdity." This seems to be at loggerheads.

Is a social system primarily determined by its economic base (ie, its mode of production) or is it primarily determined by its political and ideological superstructure?

I think there is a confusion here which needs clarity, on the subject of basically what determines a social system.

Apart from this, it was an excellent article which has given me a better understanding of the terrible tragedy that is happening in Eastern Europe.

Mitchell Barrett
London

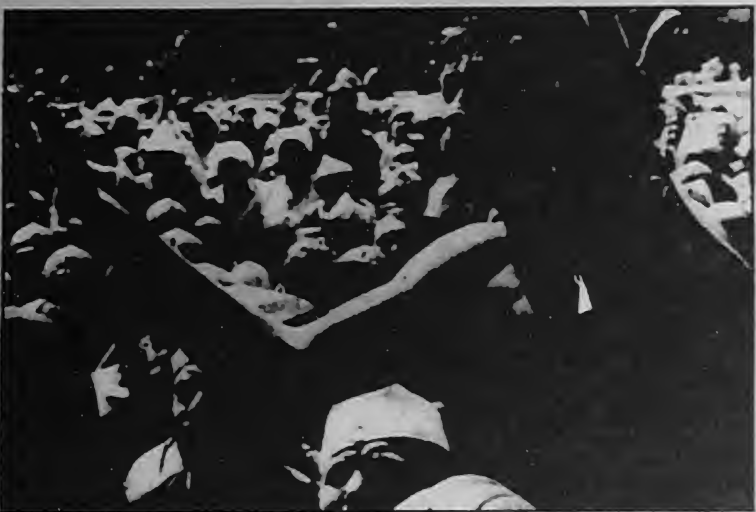
Note: Letters have been shortened due to lack of space. For political security we have changed certain names, addresses and details.

WRITE OR RING

If you would like to reply to any of these letters, raise questions or comment on articles in *The Leninist* please write to The Editor, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX. Or phone us on 01-431 3135.

How not to help Soviet workers

Should we support a "new, independent socialist trade union movement in the USSR"?



Communists shouldn't split the Soviet trade unions, but fight to win their leadership

FRONTED by Labour MP Alice Mahon, left groups such as the SWP are busily campaigning for "material and financial assistance" for Sotsprof, a "new, independent socialist trade union movement in the USSR". According to *Socialist Worker*, "the kind of independent socialist trade union organisation being built by Sotsprof has never been so urgent" (February 3 1990).

Already over £700 has been raised from trade union organisations such as Jaguar's Coventry Joint Shop Stewards Committee, Nalco Manchester Health branch, Sogat CMS HQ chapel and Bradford Teachers Association. And during the course of this month a Sotsprof representative will be touring "all" major towns in Britain to raise more.

So what should be our attitude towards Sotsprof? Obviously we support its *right* to exist, but should we *advocate* that partisans of the working class in Britain give financial aid to Sotsprof's work in the name of bringing to "life the best tradition of internationalism in our movement"?

Frankly, no! But not because we question the sincerity of Sotsprof members or have illusions in the existing trade unions.

Before presenting our arguments about Sotsprof, let's cast our minds back to 1980-81. In those days the likes of the SWP were doing their best to persuade British workers what a wonderful development Solidarnosc, the independent trade union in Poland, was (see centre pages in this issue of *The Leninist*).

Today the SWPers, Trotskyites, social democrats and Euros need a new cause. Solidarnosc is now in government; capitalism is being restored, unemployment and inflation are soaring, inflation is spiralling. Polish workers have understandably not flocked back into Solidarnosc. From its peak membership of 11 million it is now down to two million, the old official trade union is three times as big.

We do not want to tar Sotsprof with the same brush as Solidarnosc, we simply want to show them what false friends of the working class they have in Britain, and jog a few memories. Our objection to Sotsprof, however, is not its self appointed publicists in Britain. We oppose the whole Sotsprof project; it is wrong from beginning to end.

In the real spirit of proletarian internationalism, we say to those who want to defend and advance socialism in Sotsprof that they should carefully reconsider their course.

There can be no doubt that it is the working class which will bear the brunt of Gorbachev's pro-market perestroika. Along with empty shops they now face the prospect of unemployment and a growing danger of capitalist restoration. What this demands is the building of a genuine Communist Party with a programme of political revolution to stem the tide of counterrevolution and, through proletarian democracy, open up the road to communism.

Calls for a "new, independent socialist trade union movement in the USSR" are a diversion from this necessity. Sotsprof smacks of syndicalism, and can only end in disappointment.

Let us explain why. Trade unions cannot substitute for political parties; they should include within their ranks all workers, no matter what their views. We are for the trade union unity of all workers, not their organisation along religious or political lines, as in France and Italy.

The All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions in the Soviet Union has nearly 130 million members, that is 98% of the working population, who incidentally join not because they are forced to, or any such nonsense, but because of generous welfare and other benefits.

Its affiliated trade unions are organised along industrial lines, membership is determined by the production principle — manual and non-manual workers in an enterprise belong to the same trade union. That means for example that an electrician working in a coal mine belongs to the miners' union. This is something we advocate for Britain, and we are hardly unique: the SWP would agree with us. So why does it support Sotsprof, which advocates splitting up the AUCCTU and its potentially mighty industrial unions? What advantage would there be in that?

Trade unions bargain over the price of workers' only commodity, labour power. That is their essential function. They are not revolutionary parties organised for the overthrow of the wages system and should not be thought of as such. This does not mean that com-

munists should ignore trade unions. Quite the reverse, we take them very seriously.

We want to turn trade unions into mass schools for communism. We therefore emphatically oppose the slogan that trade unions should be independent of communist influence. That is the time honoured slogan of Cold War reactionaries. We will operate within them and win positions of leadership. Genuine communists will do this through the correctness of our practice, not as in the AUCCTU by writing in the leading role of communists into its statutes.

What of independence from the state? That was the subject of fierce debate at the 10th Congress of the Soviet party in March 1921. Trotsky and Bukharin wanted to see the trade unions treated much in the same way as the army, they wanted them to be made into state institutions. Lenin knew that this carried enormous dangers. He successfully argued that under socialism, especially bureaucratic socialism, they should continue to protect workers, this time from their own state. That demands their independence from the state. Officially, this is the position in the Soviet Union today.

Of course, as Sotsprof will know only too well, that is not the practice. Party and state tended to merge during the course of the 1920s, till by the 1930s they had to all intents and purposes become fused. As a result the Party-led trade unions developed a cosy relationship with management over many years and in effect came to operate under state control.

However that does not mean that under today's conditions genuine communists should support tiny 'socialist' breakaways from the AUCCTU. Communists should guard the unity of the trade union movement in the USSR and seek to win the leadership of it; make it truly independent of the state in order to mobilise the broad mass of the workers in defence of socialism and against the bureaucracy, in a political revolution.

Some will say that this is impossible. But not genuine communists. They will recall that in Spain and Italy communists operated within the fascist trade unions, and to a very large degree succeeded in turning them on their heads. Communists in Turkey have the same aim in their work in Turk-Is, the yellow trade union centre originally set up with the help of the CIA. The AUCCTU presents essentially the same challenge. So does our TUC!

Revealingly, those in Britain promoting Sotsprof do not advocate splits from the TUC, though it is led by a bureaucracy renowned for its treachery and its reactionary, pro-imperialist politics. Even when it came to the EETPU, organisations such as the SWP correctly argued that although it had been expelled from the TUC and although it was led by Hammond, an open scab, it was wrong for militants to split and thus separate themselves off from the majority. Stay in and fight, we all said. We recommend the same principle to the Sotsprof comrades.

David Sherriff

Women have always played an indispensable part in the struggle for Irish liberation; from Anne Devlin, through Constance Markievicz to Mairead Farrell. Hands Off Ireland! will be paying tribute to the contribution of women in the Irish revolution the week following International Women's Day, with meetings in North and South London (see the Action column for details). With speakers from HOI! and the video 'Mother Ireland', which contains an interview with Mairead Farrell, murdered by the SAS in Gibraltar, drawing out the ties between Irish and women's liberation. HOI! is also active in supporting the Winchester Three and the Nick Mullen Defence Campaigns. The former recently organised a successful public meeting in London, addressed by Paul Hill of the Guildford Four. The Campaign is organising a social to raise funds, on Wednesday March 21 in the Victoria pub, Holloway Road, London. As we go to press, the NMDC is about to hold a public meeting with Conlon and Hill, along with Nicky Kelly (framed by the Twenty-six Counties state for the Sallins train robbery) in the Camden Irish Centre, Murray Street NW1 on Wednesday March 7, 7.30pm. The support shown for both campaigns is encouraging, but they must go on to root themselves in the workers' movement. Trade unionists must take up the fight for their freedom, organising protest action in their workplaces, to the level of strike action. **AM**

Sixty nursery workers in

Hammersmith and Fulham Nalco have been on all-out strike for 18 weeks over a regarding claim. Over a year ago the council conceded a similar claim to Officers-in-charge and Deputies, but refused to extend it to the nursery workers. All management have offered so far is a "self-financing" package which would lead to worse working conditions. Unfortunately Nupe, the minority union in the nurseries, accepted this package and, using bureaucratic methods, managed to get acceptance from its members. Early on in the strike 25 Nupe members, disgusted at the betrayal of the dispute by their union bureaucrats, left to join Nalco. A ballot for all-out strike action in support by the whole Nalco branch was narrowly lost in a 75% turnout but a campaign of branch-wide 'days of action' has begun. One of these will be on International Women's Day, March 8, when the union will boycott the Council's celebrations and organise its own events — including a performance by the Workers Theatre Movement of its new *March 8* piece at the Nalco branch meeting, 12.30pm Hammersmith Town Hall. Nursery strikers will also be coming along to the WTM's *Internationale* club that evening. The commitment and high level of involvement of all the strikers is magnificent. In terms of organisation, determination and militancy, these workers have set a fine example and tradition for the rest of the branch and all trade unionists. **NE**

One of the measures *The Leninist* is taking to bring the paper back onto the fortnightly schedule which the situation demands is to purchase new equipment suitable for desk top typesetting. This should cut days off our production process, eliminating hold ups and shortening the period between us writing and you reading. The initial layout should be recovered in due course because of lower running costs. We are therefore making a special appeal to you, our readers, for £2,000 to buy the basic equipment needed. Comrade NB has already started us off with a pledge of £500. So send your cheques to: November Publications (DTP), BCM Box 928, London, WC1N 3XX. **JC**

Going forward



After getting off to a really good start in February our £600 monthly fighting fund ended with a surplus of £203! That really puts us in a brilliant position for March; £60 is already in. Special thanks must go to an anonymous reader who sent in £100 as well as those who give donations on a regular basis, not least comrade AS who has been sending in money sometimes on a twice weekly basis. We would also like to again urge readers to take out a bankers order. Please complete this form and send it back to us at BCM Box 928, London, WC1N 3XX:

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Workers Theatre Movement: fighting alongside Hammersmith nursery workers in struggle

The left and Poland: A sh

The wave of peaceful democratic counterrevolutions in Eastern Europe have put point blank the question put in Poland in 1981 – for or against socialism. We look back and see who was saying what



Walesa: leading the political revolution?

IN 1981 just about everyone rushed to pin a Solidarnosc badge on their lapels. Not only Thatcher and Reagan, but Labourites from Denis Healey to Eric Heffer and petty bourgeois leftists, from Mike Banda of the WRP to Tony Cliff of the SWP. "If you really want to be free, take a tip from Solidarity", warbled the Redskins, the SWP's house band at the time.

Today, Thatcher has no problems with the Solidarnosc government. It is, after all, enthusiastically implementing Thatcherism, Polski style. But what of the Redskins? One wonders if they would still urge people to emulate Solidarnosc, now that the position argued consistently by *The Leninist* – that Solidarnosc was a "yellow trade union, serving the interests of reaction at home and abroad" (James Marshall, *The Leninist* No2, spring 1982) – has been totally vindicated by reality.

Perhaps they would. Pop musicians tend to be a little shameless: The Who still sing "Hope I die before I get old", after all. But then, that's pop groups for you. The trouble is that the Redskins' political mentors in the SWP, along with practically all the rest of the petty bourgeois left, have failed to learn from the sorry Solidarnosc episode. Today everyone can see counterrevolution Solidarnosc-style in practice; yet despite this, they have gone on to support Solidarnosc type counterrevolutionary movements across the whole of Eastern Europe.

Almost to an organisation, the British left has backed the burgeoning counterrevolutionary wave sweeping across Eastern Europe, dubbing these deeply reactionary changes as "political revolutions" ... which offer "a unique opportunity" (as *Workers Hammer* put it, announcing that it was reducing its publication rate down to once every two months as a result!). One might hope that they would have learnt more than a few things from Solidarnosc and the 'political revolution', or rather *counterrevolution*, it has initiated in Poland since coming to power.

But no. Instead, the mistakes that informed them in 1956, 1968 and 1981 are being repeated. If groups like *Workers Power* or

Socialist Organiser strayed over the class line with their support for Walesa's scab outfit in 1981, then the current upheavals in Eastern Europe are seeing them codify and underline a programmatic commitment to backing counterrevolution against socialism. The consequences for such groups will be dire.

The Anglocentric and anti-Soviet petty bourgeois left in Britain remembers nothing and learns nothing. The purpose of this article is to jog a few memories.

Solidarnosc?

At the time of Solidarnosc's genesis in the huge upheavals of Polish workers in the Baltic ports in 1980, the movement was a profoundly contradictory one. On the one hand, there were the perfectly legitimate grievances of workers, offended and alienated by decades of PUWP mismanagement and graft, which provided the impetus to initially found Solidarnosc; it was, as we put it, a "result of the sins of the party" (*The Leninist* No2).

On the other hand there was the political form in which that unrest expressed itself: clerical nationalism and pro-imperialism. One did not have to be especially bright to spot this essential fact about the movement. Certainly, early in the massive August 1980 upsurge, there were reports of strikers – probably then still members of the PUWP – singing the *Internationale*. Though this was politically significant in its way, a rendition of this particular song – no matter how lustily delivered – hardly dictates the political character of a movement. Instead of clutching at straws, we thought it was far more important to look at the nature of the *leadership* of what was to become Solidarnosc.

The leaders of the strikes proudly proclaimed their Polish nationalist and Catholic ideology. Significantly, one of the key demands was access to the mass media for the Catholic church. In effect, Walesa and his cohorts were demanding that the virulently anti-communist, anti-Semitic Polish Catholic church be recognised as the official opposi-

tion, the voice of the workers.

By the time of Solidarnosc's first congress in 1981, it had consolidated itself around an explicit programme for counterrevolution and capitalist restoration. A 'taster' of this had already been given in the April of that year, when Solidarnosc had unveiled a package of economic 'reforms' which included the abolition of centralised planning and the autonomy of local enterprises on the basis of market competition: or, as we said, a "transitional programme towards capitalism" (*The Leninist* No2).

At a secret meeting of the Solidarnosc leadership on December 2, 1981, the head of Warsaw region, Zbigniew Bujak, demanded that "the government should be finally overthrown" and proposed setting up a Solidarnosc militia to do the job. His proposal was agreed. But with very little time left, the PUWP led army moved. It imposed martial law and blocked Solidarnosc's counterrevolutionary bid for power.

In Britain there was a cross class chorus of rage! Trotskyites and Euros joined Shirley Williams and Terry Duffy on the BBC-published Polish Solidarity Campaign's demonstration on December 20 1981. The banners of the SWP and the Euro CPGB were paraded alongside those reading 'Death to communism' and 'Jaruzelski equals Pinochet'.

We always regarded it as our basic duty to *unconditionally* defend every socialist country, no matter how bureaucratically distorted. If Poland fell to counterrevolution it would have had "awesome consequences for the world socialist system and therefore all workers" (*The Leninist* No2). As a result we supported the suppression of Solidarnosc. However, this did not mean we were uncritical or complacent. We certainly did not go along with every twist and turn of the PUWP, as did 'official communists' such as the NCP and the Straight Leftists.

We warned that unless the working class was won away from Walesa by genuine communists, counterrevolution would again rear its head. The army could only offer a short term solution and its coup was in itself highly dangerous. We warned that the danger of

abby record

counterrevolution did not only come from Solidarnosc, it also came from within the PUWP, not least from forces in its leadership.

It is true that we underestimated the potential for a peaceful counterrevolution, but events have very much turned out as we feared. Poland can no longer be considered a socialist state.

The fact that Solidarnosc in government is acting to restore full blown capitalism seems to have come as a surprise to most groups on the left who back in 1981 could be counted among Lech Walesa's biggest fans. It shouldn't have.

During its period of underground existence, the leadership of the movement issued a new economic programme, reprinted in the *Voice of Solidarnosc* in 1986. At the time, we reprinted just some of the points from this disgusting document:

- "In the cases of unprofitable enterprises, the principle of bankruptcy and insolvency should be rigorously adhered to."
- "The majority of state agricultural farms should be parcelled out to private farmers."
- "There should be a stock market enabling anyone to buy stocks and bonds, to become one of the sources of capital for the development of enterprises."

The programme called explicitly for the abolition of all central planning and for the market mechanism to be made supreme. In other words an open, explicit, unashamed programme for capitalist restoration. And yet still a whole swathe of the left in Britain insisted on backing it.

The rise of Gorbachevism and the political and social impasse of the PUWP bureaucracy in Poland precipitated Solidarnosc's second bite at the apple of state power. In February 1988, Jaruzelski initiated 'round table discussions' involving the Church, Solidarnosc and the Mieczyslaw Rakowski led PUWP government. This was an attempt to use the undoubted moral authority that the Church and Solidarnosc unfortunately enjoyed with the majority of the population to give the government some sort of legitimacy.

The attempt at 'controlled' reform backfired as far as the PUWP was concerned. It was humiliated in the June 1989 elections. And after the defection of the PUWP's former puppet allies and some inter-party haggling, a leading Solidarnosc intellectual, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, became premier. The dream of our Trotskyites, Euros and social democrats came true: Solidarnosc replaced the 'Stalinists' as the dominant force in Poland's government! With what results?

The Solidarnosc dominated government opened the 1990s with a massive series of price rises: 600% for coal, the basic heat source; 500% in electricity charges; a 200% mark up on petrol prices. And the country is to be turned over to capitalism and imperialist penetration: a clash between the Solidarnosc government and the workers is brewing. Walesa and his scab crew are determined to preside over the reintroduction of capitalism into Poland: millions will become unemployed as a result, and millions more will suffer ... as we always said they would.

Now let us look at the reactions of various organisations of the petty bourgeois left in Britain to developments in Poland. Although there are differences of emphasis, the common feature of all of them has been their disgusting political dishonesty. With hardly an exception they all backed Solidarnosc. They all dismissed talk of its counterrevolutionary nature. They are all now quiet as we are proved right and the Solidarnosc government starts to impose savage capitalist austerity on the workers of Poland.

Socialist Organiser

... is an especially rabid, anti-communist, Labour Party Trotskyite sect. For quite some time, this organisation has set as its criteria of 'good politics' on international issues a frothing hatred of the socialist countries. Conse-

quently, they were able to write, a number of years ago, that Frank Chapple (or Franco Chappelo, as he was more evocatively known) might have been a scab-herding, pro-capitalist, witch-hunting reactionary in his own union, but at least he had a "good line" on international matters. What *Scab Organiser* meant by a good line was that he hated living socialism and loved Solidarnosc.

That such a line could appear in the pages of what purports to be a paper committed to "workers' liberty" should suffice to tell us what we need to know about this particular group. But there's more ...

For *Socialist Organiser*, as for the majority of the Trotskyoid groups in the world, Solidarnosc's record of open pro-capitalist treachery mattered little: as long as they were anti-'Stalinists' it was okay. They fell gratefully on the occasional (very occasional) 'left' utterance from some 'left' Solidarnosc functionary as 'proof' of the 'socialist' nature of the movement, and performed profoundly unconvincing rescue jobs when the same leaders expressed their support for capitalist reaction.

Socialist Organiser, like the rest of the petty bourgeois left, had a stab at these type rescue jobs occasionally. Perhaps the most sickening was when they attempt to excuse Solidarnosc's attitude towards the miners Great Strike of 1984-85.

Solidarnosc made crystal clear its violent hostility to the miners' fight. Walesa condemned even the defensive violence of the miners facing the police onslaught. Solidarnosc also warmly welcomed a delegation from the National Working Miners' committee (the forerunner of the scab UDM) during the course of the strike. The British scabs, who called Walesa a "great fighter for democracy", were blessed with a message from the chief Polish scab himself. Walesa told them, via his personal priest, that he was "very sympathetic to your movement. My greetings to the British miners who are fighting for democracy in their union." By their friends shall ye know them.

Most explicitly, Walesa expressed his support for the "wise and brave" Thatcher in opposition to the 'violent' miners. 'Ah, but', mused *Socialist Organiser* editor John O'Mahoney in the issue of October 11, 1984, desperately trying to patch up an alibi for the Polish Scab Numero Uno: "Walesa may well think Margaret Thatcher is 'wise and brave' because of her strident rhetoric against the USSR".

Oh well, that's alright then! We can forgive Solidarnosc that little slip, can't we? Well we didn't and won't. Nor, we expect, would the militants of the NUM.

The only 'merit' that *SO* ever had was that it was more explicit in its anti-communism than other sects. At least with *Socialist Organiser* you knew where you stood, as O'Mahoney makes clear later in the same article: with the counterrevolution, against socialism.

"Suppose that movement were, in reaction to Stalinism, to advocate restoring capitalism - though Solidarnosc did nothing of the sort [sic] - even that could not lead working class socialists to side with a Jaruzelski standing for nationalisation and 'socialism' against 'counterrevolution' ... we should defend Solidarnosc even under a pro-Western leadership."

And these 'socialists' have remained true to their word, even if, as the full extent of the black reaction they were backing has become clearer, they have done so with sick grins on their faces.

In their most recent authoritative statement on the developments in Eastern Europe, *SO* writes that "as the economy of the free market and private profit spreads in Eastern Europe, the exuberant joy of the democratic revolutions will turn into the hard, set, strained faces of workers on the streets of Poland's cities" (*SO*, February 15). But at least the 'Stalinists' have gone. In fact, "the revolts in Eastern Europe are not only inspiring examples of how the masses can make history ... they are a great leap towards riding the whole world workers' movement of

the syphilis of Stalinism" (*Ibid*).

And what if that "great leap" forward was accomplished by what *SO* calls, in the same issue, workers with "suicidal illusions" in imperialism, led by "pro-bourgeois" reactionaries: at least they have done down 'Stalinism', whose triumph in a third of the world was "the worst" of the "regressions" ever to afflict the world's working class.

The fact is that the working class in Poland, like the rest of the Eastern European proletariat, now face "austerity, inflation and unemployment", that "people are hungry and desperate. The authoritarian, anti-semitic and fascist right is growing", that "very quickly" Polish workers could be crushed by a "harsh authoritarian regime" (*SO*, February 22). This is "sad", "tragic" even. But no matter, the pro-capitalist movement that won them such delights was still "wonderful" because, presumably like Thatcher, Bush or Hitler, it was against the Stalinists!

Socialist Organiser is a treacherous clot of 'Walworth Road revolutionaries' whose characteristic feature is their hatred of living socialism. Like their comrade Kinnock, they prefer capitalism to socialism. Of course, capitalism can have its negative features, but in 'Stalinism' the negative features were "exaggerated and twisted" (our emphasis), or put another way, worse.

Like many other sections of the petty bourgeois left, *SO* has scabbled about for something, anything still in the orbit of Solidarnosc to put a positive gloss on. And what have they all come up with? The delightful Polish Socialist Party - Democratic Revolution, a social democratic group which calls for "workers' self management" along the lines of the Yugoslavian market experiments, and roots itself in the tradition of the old Polish Socialist Party, the organisation of nationalist reaction and the semi-fascist Pilsudski. Still, at least they're not 'Stalinists'!

Workers Power

The dozy Labourites of *Workers Power* have in the past tried to fudge the nature of Solidarnosc and deny its counterrevolutionary essence. This, of course, has stemmed from the organisation's origins in the SWP and its congenital anti-Sovietism. But unlike the MIS socialists of *Socialist Organiser*, *Workers Power*, as an 'orthodox' Trotskyite organisation, have had to at least maintain a formal commitment to 'defence of the USSR', even if in practice this principle has been a dead letter.

Thus, *WP* simply denied even the possibility of capitalist restoration in Poland because "without imperialist willingness to break (militarily) the fundamental agreements on 'spheres' of influence reached in Yalta and Potsdam, neither the Catholic church nor the peasantry will move to overthrow state property in Poland." (Note - *Workers Power* identified the danger of capitalist restoration exclusively with the Catholic Church and the peasantry).

With capitalist restoration safely off the agenda, *WP* could get on with the job of cheering on Solidarnosc and setting itself up as the most 'radical' and intransigent left advisors to Walesa. Effectively, they lined themselves up with the most rightist and pro-imperialist elements of the counterrevolutionary movement when they criticised Walesa for tendency to compromise with the 'Stalinists'.

They adopted this tough response - effectively demanding that Solidarnosc move to take power - despite the fact that in their 'Theses on the Polish Military Coup d'Etat' (January 1982) they admitted that all the dominant tendencies were capitalist restorationist. But then, at least they were against the 'Stalinists'.

Thus a leading *Workers Power* member could happily get up on his hind legs in a public forum in October 1981 and state that "In the event of a military intervention by the Soviet Stalinists into Poland to crush Solidarity, we would say, openly, clearly state, that we would be for a military united front, that we would be for the arming of the workers - that is, against the invasion. And that would mean that if Solidarity is armed under its present leadership we will be for a military united front with that leadership against the Soviet invasion." (cited in *Spartacist*, November 1981)

That is, a 'military united front' with counterrevolutionaries against the Soviet Army, remember. Such a position could be justified only by wishing away the threat of counterrevolution. Mesmerised by the sight of masses of Polish workers taking militant action of

various kinds, *Workers Power*, like the rest of the gang, conveniently 'forgot' that these actions were being led by counterrevolutionaries against the Polish workers' state.

Thus, in the aftermath of the military crack-down, *WP* actually went as far as to call for "armed squads" and "workers militias" to fight the socialist state. In the context of the political balance of forces in Poland prevailing at the time and the nature of the leadership of the working class, this was a call for the armed, counterrevolutionary overthrow of Polish socialism!

Presumably, today it has filtered through to *Workers Power* that Solidarnosc is rather different to the cosy picture they once painted of it. This has produced two 'refinements' in the organisation's position.

First, against all the evidence, against the record of the statements of leading Solidarnosc figures and the movement's programmatic statements, *WP* insists that there is some sort of political discontinuity between Solidarnosc today, and Solidarnosc as it was. This is simply refuted by the bald facts. As we have shown, Solidarnosc in power is implementing the programme Solidarnosc had in opposition. What's your problem, comrades? You wanted it, now you've got it.

Secondly, *WP* now seems to have dropped even its formal commitment to the defence of the workers' states à la *Socialist Organiser*. In their February edition, they tell us that "International solidarity with the workers of the Eastern Bloc is an obligation for all socialists. Firstly, we must resolutely back them in their struggle against bureaucratic repression, whatever form it takes." (Our emphasis).

Whatever form it takes, *Workers Power*? Would you resolutely back a fascist form against the 'Stalinists'? And if not, why not?

The developing wave of peaceful democratic counterrevolutions in Eastern Europe has posed point blank the question posed in Poland in 1981 - for or against socialism. *Workers Power* is on the wrong side of the barricades - consistently backing the counterrevolution, "whatever form it takes".

Et al

And they're all at it. *Socialist Organiser* and *Workers Power* are simply two of the more extreme examples of the dirty hypocrisy displayed, with a few exceptions, by all the petty bourgeois left.

Take *Socialist Action*, for example. Here is a newspaper that went so overboard for Solidarnosc that it actually redesigned the masthead of its paper to ape the Solidarnosc logo. Now it has discovered (late) that "The chief facts are clear. In Poland the Solidarity led government is applying a drastic economic programme, approved by the International Monetary Fund, seeking to lay the basis for a capitalist economy." (*Socialist Action*, February/March 1990)

Yes, well spotted SA. And also, good show for working out that "this [ie, the changes in Eastern Europe - IM] is not a dramatic movement for socialist democracy, or the beginning of the political revolution, but a drive to restore capitalism".

Perhaps now a little political honesty would be in order, SA, don't you think? Are you seriously trying to suggest that the programme that Solidarnosc is implementing is any different to that it threatened Polish workers with in the *Voice of Solidarnosc* document quoted above? If you supported it then, how come you don't now?

The same goes for the likes of the Workers Revolutionary Party - which set up Arthur Scargill for a press witch hunt in 1983 because, in a private letter to Mike Banda, he dared suggest that Solidarnosc was "an anti-socialist organisation who desire to overthrow a socialist state". Now it has changed its tune. The headline in its February 3 *Workers Press* warned that "Disaster looms in Poland".

Leninists are justified in saying to them, and to all organisations of the British left that backed Solidarnosc - but comrades, you advocated disaster. You stoutly defended Solidarnosc against our criticisms. You recommended Solidarnosc as a model for British workers. You raised money to finance Solidarnosc, you demanded political freedom for it to organise, you were shrill in denouncing its suppression.

Only now do you express concern for the fate of the workers of Poland, when Solidarnosc's counterrevolutionary programme is predictably bearing its fruits of capitalist austerity. Comrades, it is a bit late in the day.

Ian Mahoney



70 YEARS

Our history

The formation of the CPGB and its early years:
articles, documents and manifestos



October shakes the world

The General Secretary of the New Communist Party, Eric Trevett, seems to have caught on that all is not well with the world. The NCP's congress in November called for "critical support" for perestroika. Now, as the purse strings tighten in Eastern Europe, the NCP is looking for new backers in the surviving anti-perestroika outposts such as North Korea, South Yemen and Cuba. Trevett also reports in the New Worker of February 23 that his retirement home for befuddled centrists has "extended our hand of friendship" to the CPB and the now virtually defunct Straight Leftists. It has also made overtures to the rabidly anti-communist Euro CPGB. Funnily enough, not to us, though. We are flattered. Trevett rounds off his wee article with a large dollop of characteristic hypocrisy: he muses that "in all probability a new international will evolve out of the current struggle ... [but] never again will the world communist movement rely on its political strategy being determined from a single national centre". This, remember, from an organisation whose whole existence has been based on shamelessly brown-nosing that "single national centre".

One lot of 'official communists' who definitely don't seem to have caught on to what is going on in the world is the falling Morning Star. It certainly can't work out why its social democratised colleague in Hungary, foreign minister Gyula Horn, should be talking about "joining Nato". Nato "has always been directed against the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries," it naively says, as if this were the 1950s and Hungary was part of the Soviet Union's monolithic socialist bloc. There can be "no excuses" for it, its editorial of February 22 1990 whines. No excuse, that is except if one happens to be opposed to socialism, like Horn and the Morning Star's other friends in Budapest.

The March issue of the Revolutionary Communist Party's glossy alternative to The Face, Living Comfortably, contains a revealing piece of self promotion. Its subscription page has a picture of some lumpen neanderthal carrying a couple of six packs and sporting a tee-shirt bearing the legend "Hey Moscow ... up yours!!", along with a missile hurtling towards the Kremlin. "I bet he subscribes to Living Marxism," says the caption. Lovely.

FOR genuine communists the touchstone of our politics has always been the October Revolution. It not only brought forth the world's first socialist state, but it marked the beginning of the world revolution: a process which, whatever temporary reverses we are suffering today, will, as long as the working class continues to exist, inevitably end in the triumph of the communist order.

Even though their miserable reformist theory and practice flies in the face of its lessons, most 'official communists' still pay lip service to the October Revolution. Not for much longer, though. The logic of opportunism must lead this trend to denounce Lenin and the Bolsheviks. If imperialism is to be appeased, if the process of social democratisation is to end in social democracy, if the peaceful, democratic counterrevolutions in Eastern Europe are to be greeted, this must be the case.

Where the former 'official communists' in Hungary and Poland have led, the Euro 'official communists' in Britain have followed with sickening enthusiasm. Writing in 7 Days, Chris Myant, the International Secretary of the Euro organisation, tells its dwindling readership that the October Revolution "was a mistake of truly historic proportions" and that its "consequences" have been "severe". According to this warped little man they include "a second world war; Hitler's gas chambers; Stalin's gulag; the world of show trials; the perpetuation of third world fascist dictatorships; the unprecedented, almost unbelievable waste of the arms race in a world of poverty and starvation; the destruction of the Vietnam war..." (February 24 1990).

Looking at such anti-communist clap-trap and the speed of the Euros' ideological evolution, it is worth recalling that the leader of Britain's blackshirts, Sir Oswald Mosley, started off as a 'moderniser' in the Labour Party, and that Benito Mussolini was for many years the editor of the Socialist Party's paper. Given that the Euros still call their disintegrating organisation a 'Communist Party' and that they are due to 'celebrate' the 70th anniversary of the CPGB, it is also worth recalling the reac-

tion to the October Revolution by *The Call*, the paper of the British Socialist Party, which provided the majority of cadre of the CPGB when it was formed on July 31-August 1 1921.

There can be no doubt that although it suffered from a lack of information and a certain inclination towards centrism, *The Call* stands in complete contrast to the likes of Myant, who would undoubtedly now side with the government of Kerensky and the forces of counterrevolution.

The Second Russian Revolution

The expected has happened, Kerensky and the Provisional Council has been overthrown, and the Soviet has taken control in Petrograd. Would that the Soviet had never surrendered its power at the beginning of the Revolution, Russia would have been in a far stronger position than she is now. As it is this second Revolution may still have been brought about in time. The reactionaries are hoping for civil war. How affairs will shape in the event of an armed conflict, we cannot at the time of writing predict. We know that Maximalist opinion has rapidly spread throughout Russia. The workmen, peasants, and soldiers have remained faithful to the Revolution. Even if the reactionaries are able to muster a force to oppose the new Government, there are, nevertheless, strong hopes that the Revolution will be saved. It is not difficult to trace the events that led up to, and made necessary the deposing of Kerensky and the Provisional Government. From the first moment that he began to compromise with the middle-class parties he has steadily drifted towards the Right. He became an easy tool in the hands of the reactionaries. He sanctioned a disastrous offensive. He sought the suppression of the Army Committees that protected the Army from its reactionary Generals. It is established now that he was closely implicated in the Korniloff rising. Its object at first was to suppress the Soviet and establish a triple dictatorship, including himself. That he was not the leader of the Korniloff rising instead of its

apparent suppressor was simply the result of a misunderstanding. Since then his opposition to the Soviet took another form. The recent Coalition Government and Provisional Council was designed to remove all powers from the Soviet. This it would have done but for the action of the Maximalists. It was becoming noticeable, too, that the Government was reverting to the Imperialist policy of Tsardom. Kerensky, from leader of the Revolution, became leader of the counterrevolution.

The Call No84, November 15 1917.

Russia in travail

The conflicting reports and rumours that emanated from Russia during the last week made it impossible to arrive at any conclusion as to what is happening there. No doubt the character of the news reflected the turmoil and distractions that existed as a result of the clash of rival forces. A clearer view of what transpired could be obtained towards the end of the week, and the dispatch of the *Daily News* correspondent in Petrograd gives rise to the hope that a satisfactory solution will be arrived at. It is clear, at any rate, that the forces of Kerensky, after a temporary success, have been defeated. This in itself does not ensure an immediate return to tranquillity. The more hopeful news is the action of the Railway Workers' Union. It has issued a circular-telegram stating that civil war was imposed by a body of men who were unable to maintain authority; hence the Union decided only to support a Socialist Government of all shades, including the Bolsheviks. The Railway Union has, of course, the power to command respect for its wishes, and if it so desired it could paralyse the movements of both sides. It did, in fact, declare a strike for Sunday last. On the same evening a conference took place between the Union and the Socialist parties. A programme was drawn up including the formation of a Socialist Government, an early peace and the transfer of land to agrarian communities. No agreement could be reached on the inclusion of the Bolsheviks in the proposed Government. The defeat of Kerensky has strengthened the position of the Bolsheviks, who insisted on participation in the Government. It was proposed to organise a Council of the People consisting of representatives of the Soviets, the peasants, all the Socialist parties, the Petrograd and Moscow City Councils, and Railway and Postal Trade Unions, for purposes of forming the new Government ... The proposals of the Railway Union provides the most hopeful means of dealing with the situation. Control in the hands of a Socialist Government would serve the best interests of Russia and the Russian people. If this be accomplished, the Bolshevik revolution will have been justified.

The Call No85, Thursday November 22 1917.

Russia's Second Revolution

In the midst of a war which represents the highest triumph of international capitalist Imperialism, and in a country which, to all appearances, is further from Socialism than any other in the world, Socialists - genuine, and not make-believe Socialists - have seized the reins of power. That alone would have sufficed to strike dismay into the hearts of the ruling classes throughout the "civilised" world. But in the present circumstances their dismay is doubly profound, for the Leninist "usurpers" have come to carry out the watchword of the Russian Revolution in earnest. They have come to realise a peace without annexations and indemnities, with the right of nationalities to determine their own fate. To proclaim the land public property and to hand it over to the tillers without any compensation to its former owners, to seize the illicit "earnings" of the wage-profiters. To establish an all-round eight hours day, and to publish all the secret diplomatic correspondence and treaties, which have hitherto been regarded by the capitalist world as sacrosanct and inviolable - and all that immediately, without further delay, reservation or compromise. What wonder that the Allies refuse to recognise the authority of the "usurpers" and that the enemy stand perplexed?

The situation is unique - as is the war itself which has brought it about. For the first time we have the dictatorship of the proletariat established under our eyes, and that in a country whose immense extent and population, as well as potential strength, make it a factor in international life of first class importance. How long will it last? What fruit will it bear? It is early to tell as yet. What we know is that the Bolshevik success has been carried out with the sympathy and support of the town workers and the common soldiers in the Army. It was an act of despair on the part of these masses at seeing the peace-meal surrender of the Revolution and its behests to the Imperialist bourgeoisie by the opportunist leaders. On the Bolsheviks' own part it was prompted by a courageous loyalty to the principles of International Socialism as laid down, for the time of war, by the Stuttgart and Basel Congresses, and the success of their actions was and is due to the support and sympathy of the masses. On the one hand the utter exhaustion of the nation at large deprives the bourgeoisie of the strength and courage to translate its hatred of the Bolsheviks and their fear of their rule into action. This latter circumstance is a factor which may prove lasting and may help to make the Bolshevik rule more permanent than seems at present reasonable. If they find the means and the energy to put through the main items of their programme, they will have achieved a tremendous revolution. Their position is difficult beyond words. Morally isolated in the world and silently boycotted at home, their only support is, or ought to be, the international working class. Will it support them? Will it realise that it is their own cause which is being fought out over there by men who have staked their lives on it? Peace, and bread, the suppression of the war-profiters and the greedy landlord: this is what Lenin and his friends are trying to obtain for their own countrymen and for the distressed world at large. Are we going to help them?

The Call No86, Editorial, Thursday November 29 1917.

REVIEWS

No Answers

Lindsey German, *Sex, class and socialism*, Bookmarks 1989, pp256, £5.95

IN HER introduction, Lindsey German states simply and correctly that women's oppression is "clearly a major feature of capitalist society" and "at the heart of that oppression lies the institution of the family" (p64). She goes on to identify the double burden of women workers: the first in the form of social labour in the workplace; the second as an unpaid privatised worker within the family.

German takes on feminist theories – both radical and 'socialist' – of the family and patriarchy. She confronts their anti-Marxist positions, the idea of the primacy of patriarchy over the class struggle and the myth "that male domination exists over and above the particular economic mode of production in which it features" (p61).

She makes the important point that, by identifying the family as part of the superstructure rather than the base, Marxists do not diminish the importance of the family in the oppression of women, but instead are stating objectively that the base – the mode of production – influences the form of institutions in the superstructure, including the family.

Despite not following in the exact footsteps of her mentor Tony Cliff, in his book *Class struggle and women's liberation*, the SWP's economism shows through; the only worthwhile struggle is the trade union struggle. This leads her to imply that men do not benefit from women's oppression in the family. Of course in the short term they do; they get a skivvy, child rearer and cook. As Engels pointed out, in the family the man is equivalent to the bourgeoisie whilst the woman is like the proletariat.

Since the advent of capitalist society in Britain, women workers have played an active role in industrial struggles, and this is well documented in her book along with the attempts to organise women along separatist lines. German rightly says that separatism has acted as an obstacle to women's liberation.

It is necessary and in the interests of both sexes to mobilise working class women and men on the question of women's oppression, and to raise democratic demands such as the socialisation of domestic labour, 24 hour nurseries, free abortion and contraception on demand etc. Feminism is formally committed to these demands, but it has shown a constant tendency to backtrack.

A good example of this is the defensive campaigns around abortion rights which were organised in the mid 1970s, which although defeating White's Bill, refused to call for free abortion on demand. This tactic was repeated in 1987, with the Fight Alton's Bill campaign, where the SWP (German's organisation) restricted itself to a defence of the 1967 Act which, although an advance at the time, still restricts women's rights. The slogan 'free abortion on demand' was dropped, but the author – in spite of the comprehensive nature of her book – fails to mention this campaign. I wonder why?

The disintegration of the organised feminist movement, its retreat into academia, quangodrom and the lower echelons of the labour bureaucracy are proof of the inadequacies of its theory. The idea that the cause of women's oppression

was primarily due to patriarchy, that women's liberation lay in a cross class alliance of women and that men were the problem, inevitably led to marginalisation and passivity.

The women's world is divided just like the world of men, into proletarian and bourgeois. This was well put by Domitila Chungara, the wife of a Bolivian tin miner, quoted by German. Speaking at an international conference of women in Mexico, she confronted the feminists: "Every morning you show up in a different outfit and I don't. Every day you show up all made up and combed like someone who has time to spend in an elegant beauty parlour and who can spend money on that, and yet I don't ... Now, senora, tell me: is your situation at all similar to mine? ... So what equality are we going to speak of between the two of us? If you and I aren't alike, if you and I are so different? We can't, at this moment, be equal, even as women, don't you think?" (p187).

Although she criticises the feminists for failing to correctly address the material base of women's oppression, German does not provide a comprehensive theoretical and practical programme, a "revolutionary answer to the women's question" (p12). Instead we are treated to an analysis of the *Women's Voice* organisation (an SWP front).

In 1979 there was a debate within the SWP as to its relationship with *Women's Voice*. It was decided that it should be closely tied to the SWP. Two years later, however, it was closed down. Of course the blame was put on the 'downturn' in working class struggle – the fact that the "participants had a false overestimation of what could be achieved" in this period and "a major misconception about the nature of feminism" (p222).

The author seems to have been put off by this experience, as she does not put forward any sort of argument for building a real, mass working class women's movement. This says more about the politics and practice of the SWP than about the lack of need for such a movement.

Nick Ellis

Apartheid 'Justice'

Euzhan Palcy, *A Dry White Season*, (15) MGM 1989

"BLIND prejudice, blind terror, blind justice" are the three phrases chosen to describe this recently released film set in South Africa in 1976 during the Soweto uprisings. Unfortunately it is blind to the revolutionary situation which the Soweto uprising ushered in.

Basically, it deals with one white man's desire to see 'justice' in his country following the murder of his gardener and his gardener's son by the South African police after a mass demonstration in a black township. A rather unimaginative and typically middle class choice. That said, the film has its virtues.

Unlike some other films that have been on general release, which tend to marginalise the way of life endured by the black population in South Africa, *A Dry White Season* is not one dimensional. Whatever its faults it gives us a glimpse of the down to earth and often moving struggle of the people and their day to day resistance against apartheid.

We are shown the contrasting life styles of white prosperity and

black squalor, which are reinforced by powerful images of children being beaten and killed during demonstrations.

We are shown how they suffer under the sickening torture techniques used by the police when extracting information from black prisoners and their families.

We are shown how they continue to resist an apartheid system which is thoroughly exposed for what it is – corrupt, menacing, callous and horrific.

All this is good, very good.

In spite of this, however, the message is rather predictable, simply because the central player in this film, like most western films, is an individual – the isolated, if shabby, individual who stands against injustice and in the end triumphs.

Hence although Marlon Brando plays a superb role some of his lines could have come from, yes, a Hollywood western. Throughout the 90 minutes, we are presented with a series of gems like: "the best way to remember a man is to keep on fighting". Ironically therefore, although every aspect of South African life is affected by the revolutionary struggle of the black masses, this film does not put the black masses centre stage, instead a sarcastic white lawyer.

So, for all its dramatic background as well as its wit, this film does not go beyond the confines of bourgeois liberalism. Its radicalism is perfectly respectable, and perfectly safe. Although the state is criticised, it is criticised for its hypocrisy: "law and justice are like two distant cousins not on speaking terms", says Brando: a Brando who, while he rips apart police evidence and exposes their corruption, nonetheless accepts that law and justice have some sort of family relationship in apartheid South Africa.

Not surprisingly this 'open minded' film refuses to face up to the revolutionary situation that exists in South Africa. A revolutionary situation which at the end of the day has only two possible outcomes: either fascist counterrevolution or working class led revolution. *A Dry White Season* imagines that some middle way is possible, that apartheid can be ended in the way segregation was broken down in the US south. So ultimately the solution is seen in reforming the state itself, rather than a mass movement which overthrows it.

Time after time the film shows the state coming out on top; nowhere are we given any indication of the ideological shift among the heroic black youth from black consciousness towards the solutions offered by the ANC, let alone by Marxism. We are shown police terror but not the emergence of street committees and the flood into the organisations of the underground.

As a result I could not help feeling that this film had been made before: civil rights type courtroom drama shifted from Louisiana to South Africa. There were no surprises therefore, no real insight.

Of course, this film never intended to produce a strategy, but its reliance on what are the clichés of Hollywood in the end produce disappointing cinema. Because it does not face up to the revolution we are presented with a solution within the system.

This, for the masses, is impossible. Their answer to South Africa's crisis does not lie in bringing together law and justice, but smashing the whole system. Until films start showing this the best of them remain two dimensional; the masses who have suffered the horror of apartheid call out for a three dimensional solution.

Gareth Phillips

ACTION

The Leninist

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March for Justice and Freedom organised by the Irish in Britain Representation Group: Saturday March 17.

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Public Meetings: Women and the Irish war, with speakers from HOI! and video, 'Mother Ireland':

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South London: Wednesday March 14, 7.30pm, St Matthew's Meeting Place, Brixton Hill, SW2.

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March 22: The importance of Ireland for the British working class. Phone 01-431 3135 for details.

Workers Theatre Movement

International Women's Day celebration: *The*

Internationale club, at the Old Piano Warehouse, Hawley Road, Camden Town, NW1. Thursday March 8, 7.30pm and again on Wednesday March 14, 7.30pm. Chat's Palace, Homerton Community Centre, 42-4 Brooksby's Walk, London E9. Bring your own wine and beer to the Camden venue.

Poll Tax theme at *The Internationale* club, Old Piano Warehouse, Hawley Road, Camden Town, NW1. Sunday April 1, 7.30pm

Rehearsals: Every Sunday in London. Phone Paul Harrington on 01-431 3135 or write to WTM, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX for details of WTM activities.

Unemployed Workers Charter

Unemployed Organiser No6: Out now! Bulk prices including postage: 8 for £1; 100 and over at 10 for £1. Use with UWC petition at the dole office or on street collections. Poster cover to mobilise for the March 28 lobby of TUC (see below).

Central London Meetings:

Monday March 12: The unemployed petition to parliament, 1932. 8.00pm Diorama Arts Centre, 18, Park Square East, NW1 (tube: Regents Park or Great Portland Street)

Monday March 19: Public Meeting: Stop TUC collaboration with slave labour schemes! 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 (tube: Holborn).

Lobby of TUC General Council: Stop TUC collaboration with slave labour schemes! 9am Wednesday March 28, Congress House, Great Russell Street, WC1 (tube: Tottenham Court Road).

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Fight Gorbachevism

As most 'official communist' parties renounce 'communism' and embrace social democracy, there are some organisations in what was the world communist movement that proclaim themselves firmly Marxist-Leninist. We look at three of them: the New Communist Party, the Communist Party of the USA and the South African Communist Party

GORBACHEV'S "new thinking" was adopted as policy by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as long ago as the summer of 1985. With it the CPSU announced that there no longer existed an antagonistic contradiction between imperialism and socialism, that there was no longer any need to overthrow capitalism and that talk of the class struggle was outdated. Such social democratic statements reflected the fact that the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union had definitively become reactionary, was seeking a deal with imperialism and that there existed a danger of capitalist restoration from the highest levels.

Certainly, to anyone familiar with history, Gorbachev's incessant talk about supposed new developments invalidating scientific truths is old hat. The very use of the term "new" should sound a warning: it has always been used as a cloak for revisionism (ie bourgeois ideas presented as Marxism-Leninism).

Marxism understands the struggle of ideas as a form of the class struggle, as class struggle expressed in the ideological sphere. The diametrically opposed interests of the bourgeoisie and the working class cannot but be expressed in diametrically opposed ideas. In analysing conflicting ideas, communists must look below the surface to reveal which class interests are served by particular ideas.

This is certainly necessary when we consider Gorbachevism. We, unlike others, do not take its statements about 'renewing socialism' and 'political revolution' at face value.

Bourgeois ideas, if they are to function as revisionism, to gain influence covertly within the communist movement, rather than overtly against it, invariably pretend to be innovative. They cannot present themselves as bourgeois; they must be identified as such not by their label, but by analysing and revealing their content. Nevertheless, as we know from countless examples in the past, labels such as 'new' or 'modern' are pretty familiar tell-tale signs.

Any new development in Marxism-Leninism, on the other hand – and new developments are absolutely essential if theory is to keep pace with real developments in the world, to be a guide to action in new situations which arise – must always be at pains to demonstrate its continuity with the established theoretical achievements of scientific socialism, its consistency with the fundamental truths discovered by Marx, Engels and Lenin, at the

same time proving its validity on the basis of the latest information available, the latest social developments in society and the highest achievements of modern science.

Gorbachev's "new thinking" proclaimed not continuity, but a break from the past, and warned – for those with eyes to see and ears to hear – of the coming wholesale rejection of communist ideas which is now accompanying the process of counterrevolution and the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union.

Genuine communists must wage an uncompromising struggle against Gorbachevism, there can be no room for being mealy-mouthed about it. Yet while today the whole of the capitalist world recognises Gorbachev as its ally, the self proclaimed "sound parties" of 'official communism' still cling desperately to their illusions, not least that socialism is being "renewed", despite its demise in Poland, Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia, and the imminent gobbling up of the GDR by imperialist Federal Germany.

None of the three organisations under consideration in this article have, for all their supposed Marxism-Leninism, dared to come out unambiguously against Gorbachevism, let alone with any sort of analysis as to why one socialist government after another has fallen and why this danger is growing within the Soviet Union itself. All, in other words, suffer from right centrism.

NCP

The New Communist Party leadership was roused from its tailist stupor by two – for it – major events: 1. The condemnation by both the Czechoslovak CP and the CPSU of the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops – agreement with which was hitherto the *raison d'être* of the NCP.

2. The cutting off of funds which has allowed the tiny and lazy membership of the NCP to have a 20p weekly paper, 15 paid full timers and large headquarters.

These developments have forced the general secretary, Eric Trevett, to go into print (he is not a natural or prolific writer). In response to the general crisis of socialism and the 1914 type turn towards the bourgeoisie by mainstream 'official communism' he has called for those NCP members who remain loyal to him to donate their savings now that the NCP "will have to survive on its own resources" (*The New Worker*, February 23 1990). And in another crass admission, this time at its December 1989 con-

gress, he announced that it was time to stop being "mealy-mouthed", and to question non-class concepts like "Glasnost, New Thinking, Common European Home, Universal Human Values, Our Partners." (*The New Worker*, December 11 1989)

Despite his conclusion that the Soviet "line on a number of questions is a revisionist one", the NCP general secretary continued to give "critical support" to perestroika. And although having identified the "barrage" of revisionist "non-class concepts" listed above, all of which come from Gorbachev himself, nowhere does he condemn Gorbachevism and admit that it is counterrevolutionary.

The reader will, of course, be aware that we are paying some attention to the Darby and Joan NCP not because it wields any influence in the British working class, which it does not, nor because of its rigorous pursuance of Marxist-Leninist truth. This it cannot do. No, it offers us an example of the centrist impotence of the 'sound' wing of 'official communism', which only criticises when forced to, and then in the most meek, mild and 'mealy-mouthed' fashion possible.

The root of this lies in the unwillingness of centrism to face up to the task of revolution. Instead of building a vanguard party, they have always sought an easy ride by acting as a cheerleader for whoever happened to be at the top of the CPSU. As we have always argued, political prostitution gets you nowhere in the long term.

Gorbachev does not need the NCP when he can command the services of the *Guardian* and the *Financial Times*. As a result the NCP's whole political project is doomed. It clutches at straws, imagines that its "cooperation agreement" with South Yemen will save it and still, just in case, gives "critical support" to the restorationist strategy of perestroika. But nothing will save it.

Where the NCP general secretary reassures himself that "there is clear evidence of a fight to strengthen internationalism in the communist movement" (*The New Worker*, February 23 1990) the official optimism of the Communist Party of the USA is even more other worldly.

CPUSA

National board member Jarvis Tyner, in an interview with the *Morning Star's* Roger Trask on February 13, speaks of "the apparent rejection of communism by large numbers of people in the

European socialist countries," (my emphasis, *IF*). Don't worry, however, "a stronger socialism" will "probably" emerge "if they are able to perfect what they are doing."

Faced with mass anti-communist demonstrations and democratic counterrevolutions, he speaks of "apparent" anti-communism and happily draws the lesson that "when people mobilise, they have power." He evidently believes that "what is going on in Eastern Europe" is democratic renewal of socialism, and that this will make it more attractive, leading to the withering away of anti-communism. The CPUSA must therefore "move faster to emphasise the democratic element" of democratic centralism, so as to be able "to grow much faster as the level of anti-communism falls" (my emphasis, *IF*).

Although the CPUSA leadership has given a "warm welcome" to perestroika and glasnost, Trask notes the sense of concern among cadres at the party's seven floor headquarters in downtown Manhattan, and suggests on his own part, "perhaps the optimism is false, or simply a way of putting a brave face on the events that have transformed life in the East European socialist states."

What is going on, unfortunately, is in fact counterrevolution, and the effect will not be a lessening of anti-communism, but a period of deep reaction when communists can expect to be first the butt of ridicule and then the object of state and right wing violence. This will, however, come as a surprise to Tyner, who has his head buried deep in the sand. With such blindness what use can the CPUSA be for the working class of the United States?

The CPUSA, "renowned for its consistent political support for the socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union," has "come out fighting" in defence of Marxism-Leninism, according to Trask. By way of illustration, Tyner tells us that "some years ago we dropped the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat," – the touchstone of a Marxist, according to Lenin – hardly a good example of fighting in defence of Marxism-Leninism! Trask admits that Tyner is forthright in his criticism of the failure of the central command economies of Eastern Europe – easy, after the event, isn't it? – but cautious about commenting on his party's previous reluctance to criticise them. This is typical centrism, and typically useless.

SACP

Combating Gorbachevism – with its talk of deals with imperialism over the world's hot spots, ie countries with a revolutionary situation – must be a priority in South Africa, gripped as it is by a revolutionary situation. And yet, after toying with some sort of South African exceptionalism from Gorbachevism last year, the SACP seems determined to swallow it hook, line and sinker.

Although the January 1990 SACP "draft" pamphlet by Joe Slovo, *Has Socialism Failed?* (£1.50 plus p&p from Inkululeko

publications, PO Box 902, London, N19 3YY) was authorised by the party's leadership "as a launching pad for further critical thought", its unofficial nature saves the SACP from accusations of Gorbachevism. Nevertheless, it represents the "first reflections of the author", who happens to be party general secretary.

Slovo's assessment was out of date before it was published, warning that the Eastern European countries "will be easy targets for those aiming to achieve a reversion to capitalism." Too late, comrade! Where a pro-capitalism government has been installed, whether through the initiative of the old 'communist' ruling party of the bureaucracy, as in Hungary, or through its defeat, as in Poland, – but in all cases, unfortunately, with popular consent – counterrevolution has already taken place.

"These were popular revolts against unpopular regimes," and Slovo challenges "socialists [not communists?] to come to terms with this reality". In effect, Slovo is advocating what Lenin called "bowing to spontaneity". In liberal terms, we must 'accept the verdict of the people': if the masses want counterrevolution we must accept their views. But communists have a duty to speak the truth *especially* when it is unpopular. If we simply "come to terms" with public opinion, we might as well shut up shop.

For Slovo, it is vital now to "subject the past of existing socialism to an unsparing criticism". We agree; but criticism of the *present* leadership needs the same treatment and is almost entirely missing here.

There is, for example, a wholesale acceptance of Gorbachev's rosy utopian view of the world situation: "humanity is today poised to enter an unprecedented era of peace and civilised international relations" (p2). This is dangerous nonsense.

If socialism was the bulwark of world peace, and socialism is collapsing, then the danger of World War III is strengthened enormously. Imperialism has won the cold war, socialism has lost. Now inter-imperialist contradictions will move centre stage. Slovo's evident belief in peaceful imperialism is anti-Leninist. It stinks of the Browderist class collaborationism which led both the CPUSA and the Communist Party of South Africa to liquidate themselves in the aftermath of World War II. Gorbachevism is now leading them in the same direction.

Already under the influence of Slovo's utopian Gorbachevite outlook, instead of subordinating negotiations to the task of insurrection to overthrow the apartheid state, the armed struggle is being reduced to a mere bargaining counter in a negotiated sellout.

After looking at the NCP, the CPUSA and the SACP it is clear that genuine communists everywhere must break from the confines of centrism if they are to fight Gorbachevism and do their duty to the world's working class. Comrades, before victory over imperialism is possible we must defeat opportunism. Comrades, rebel!

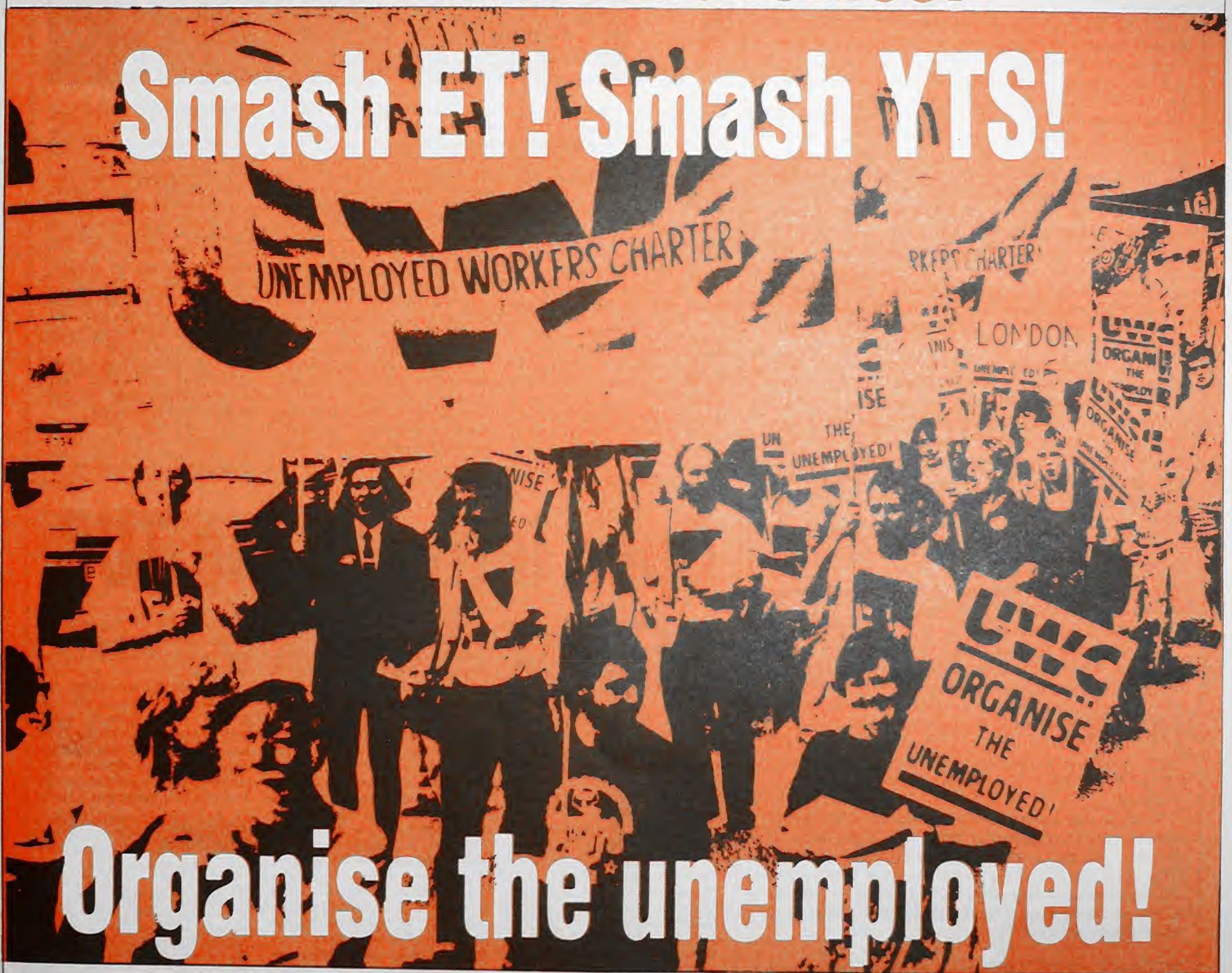
Ian Farrell

Unemployed **ORGANISER**

Paper of the Unemployed Workers Charter, Issue No6

Stop TUC collaboration with slave labour schemes!

Smash ET! Smash YTS!



Organise the unemployed!

- Lobby the TUC general council. 9.00am Wednesday March 28. Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. (tube: Tottenham Court Road)
- Public Meeting. 7.30pm Monday March 19. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. (tube: Holborn)

UWC

UNEMPLOYED WORKERS CHARTER

BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX. Tel: 01-431 3135

A Further Attack

The Social Security Act, which came into force in October 1989, has made claiming unemployment benefit much more difficult. In addition to being available for and capable of work, unemployed people are now expected to prove that they are "actively seeking work" every week. Failure to provide evidence that you have taken "all reasonable steps" to find a job could lead to benefit being stopped for two weeks, or longer if no "improvement" occurs.

This Act smacks of the hideous "Not genuinely seeking work" clause of the 1927 Unemployment Act, where thousands of unemployed people were deprived of benefit because of their inability to provide "proof" that they were searching for work. Then, as now, many measures were taken by the government to force people into low paid employment.

Of course, what the Act conveniently doesn't impose are any obligations on the bosses to employ more people, or even to acknowledge job applications. Thus even gathering the evidence that you have been busily applying for jobs all week is made difficult. The whole Act puts the onus on the unemployed to find work — even when there is little work about. If you can't, tough!

This is another step by the government towards compulsory work for dole. As with ET and YTS, which are already undercutting existing pay rates for employed workers, the "actively seeking work" clause will further undermine the wages and conditions of those in work, as it allows employers to exploit the unemployed, who no longer have the right to refuse a job on the basis that the wages offered undercut the established rate for the job.

A lot of anger exists within our class, both employed and unemployed, towards the Social Security Act, the "actively seeking work" clause and the Tories' cheap labour schemes, ET and YTS. This anger must be channelled into action.

In 1988, when the ET scheme was launched, the UWC organised a mass lobby of the Trades Union Congress, which voted to boycott ET, a decision which the general council subsequently overturned. That is why the UWC is calling on its supporters to lobby the general council at 9am on Wednesday March 28. ET, as well as the "actively seeking work" clause, will be the focus of our four day march from Manchester and lobby of the 1990 TUC at Blackpool on Monday September 3.

We need many more activists to become UWC members and get busy using our petition and this paper at the dole offices, in workplaces and on the street, to help swell these actions. And we need many more labour movement organisations to affiliate, so that the UWC can truly represent the unity of employed and unemployed workers.

February's official unemployment figures showed a further 48,000 on the dole. The 'seasonally adjusted' figures still show a downward trend, but the downward curve is levelling off, and the number of vacancies is the smallest for a very long time. Even the government's fake figures, which conceal hundreds of thousands of jobless people in various dead-end schemes, are giving tell-tale signs of the coming massive rises in unemployment which capitalism undoubtedly holds in store for us.

So get active and help us build the fightback. Join the UWC

STRENGTH TO STRENGTH



Last September's march on the TUC from Manchester to Blackpool was a major step forward for the Unemployed Workers Charter. Months of hard work culminated in four days of action as employed and unemployed workers marched through towns and cities throughout the north-west of England.

Supporters of the UWC will no doubt be aware of the importance we placed on the march, not only its practical benefits but also the idea and the aims surrounding it. As this was the third time we have attempted to hand our petition to the TUC, we were even more determined that our action would be successful and our petition would be finally accepted by our 'leaders'.

As has been typical throughout our campaigning, the UWC came across barriers which tried to stop our march and put hindrance to our organisation. Preston trades council withdrew their promise of overnight accommodation a couple of days before we were due to get there, and various other venues on our march were warned of our approach: 'Unrecognised bodies' such as ourselves weren't to be given any sort of support. Perhaps their people are afraid of the consequences of the support which the UWC is continuing to build?

Not being daunted by such reactionaries, the UWC carried on with its march and certainly placed its name on the map in the north-west as a hard, militant and organised campaigning group for the unem-

ployed. Many more names were placed on our petition as we marched through the towns, and donations were plentiful.

Our special thanks are due to the people at Bolton trades council, whose support we were truly grateful for, and whose help set an example to others in solidarity work.

Many thanks also to all union branches throughout the country who sponsored the march. In particular we would like to thank Hammersmith and Fulham Nalco for their donation of £100.

The UWC goes from strength to strength after each action. Let's press forward and make the 1990 march even more successful.

Open letter to the TUC

To the General Council of the TUC,
Congress House,
Great Russell Street,
London, WC1.

February 28, 1990

Dear Colleagues,
•STOP TUC COLLABORATION WITH THE TORY GOVERNMENT'S SLAVE LABOUR SCHEMES!
•ORGANISE THE UNEMPLOYED!

I am writing to request the opportunity for a representative of the Unemployed Workers Charter to address the General Council meeting on Wednesday March 28, or another General Council meeting, on the question of bringing an end to trade union collaboration with the Tory government's work-for-dole Employment Training scheme, and on our demand that the TUC takes on the task of organising unemployed workers into a national organisation, a union of their own alongside other unions, with representation on local trades councils and in the TUC itself.

The 1988 Trades Union Congress, at which the Unemployed Workers Charter organised a mass lobby against the new ET scheme,

Congress criticised the General Council for having given "critical support" for Employment Training, since it did not "meet any of the principles laid down by the General Council as necessary for endorsement," and instructed the General Council to "withdraw support forthwith and institute a policy of non-cooperation."

By failing to carry out this decision of Congress the General Council has done no favours to the unemployed, nor to trade union members. The scheme is used to harass unemployed workers into undercutting the wages and conditions of those in work, as well as dishonestly reducing the unemployment statistics. This harassment has now been taken a step further with the introduction of the "actively seeking work" clause, which makes ET effectively compulsory. The government's aim is to keep unemployed workers atomised, demoralised and believing that unemployment is their own fault.

Our aim is to build a national unemployed workers movement to be the voice of the unemployed, to fight for full maintenance of unemployed workers, proper training at trade union rates and the right to work. Such a movement would mobilise unemployed workers on

the side of those taking industrial action, instead of leaving them disorganised as a vulnerable source of scab labour.

Our request to present the UWC's petition to the 1989 Congress — after a four day march from Manchester to Blackpool — was refused, and we were told that the TUC is "not able to accept petitions. If your petitioners wish to change TUC policy this is a matter they should pursue through their respective unions." This is a bit like asking a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

In September 1990 the UWC will again be marching from Manchester to the Blackpool TU Congress to press its demands, and lobbying on the first day of Congress. Unemployed organisation is in all respects in the interests of trade union members, and so deserves the support of the TUC. We therefore request the General Council to receive a UWC representative to put the case against ET, for unemployed organisation and for the 1990 Congress to receive a delegation to present the UWC petition to the delegates.

Yours faithfully,
Stan Kelsey,
Secretary

CPSA DISPUTES

The UWC has always stressed the need for the unemployed and employed to fight back together, united against Tory cuts. During November 1989, we joined striking CPSA members outside the Marylebone UBO. Workers there were protesting against Department of Employment staff shortages in London and the rest of the country.

With cuts biting hard across all government departments, management are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit staff. Indeed, because of this, many workers in DE simply leave as the pressure of an ever increasing workload with less and less staff becomes intolerable. This, of course, has a knock on effect on the unemployed: providing them with even a basic service becomes impossible.

Only united, organised action between employed and unemployed workers has the capacity to effectively smash the Tory onslaught.



Time to stand up, get organised and fight back

For the UWC, shorter hours means more jobs. Every victory in the engineers' 35 hours struggle is a blow against unemployment and helps to strengthen the working class as a whole. Send SAE for collecting sheets for the UWC's Engineers' Solidarity Fund.

UNDERWHELMED

A report by the Centre for Alternative Industrial Technological Systems (CAITS) shows that even the bosses are underwhelmed by ET. Employers are only providing just over 11% of the places available for trainees. The high profile advertising campaign that adorns billboards up and down the country - "Sainsbury's is training the workers without jobs..." etc - is therefore totally misleading: in fact, these adverts have been paid for by the government. It seems that no one - neither the unemployed nor the bosses - has been taken in by the ET con job.

TECS

ET, YTS and all the other government cheap labour schemes are soon to be administered through Training and Enterprise Councils (Tecs) controlled by private employers. A *Draft Tec Handbook* of last December leaked to the UWC from inside the Training Agency ("on no account should this draft be copied or passed to anyone outside the department"). Whoops!), outlines plans for these Tecs. Two thirds of these bodies are to be made up of local employers, who will then decide the makeup of the remaining third. "Local authorities, local education authorities, the voluntary sector or trade unions" will possibly be drawn onto the Tecs. This privatisation of 'training' will give the bosses total control over 'trainees'. In effect, it will be direct labour conscription. 'Trainees' will be dragooned onto cheap labour schemes by the very people who will directly benefit from keeping them unorganised, underpaid and intimidated. This underlines the urgency of the UWC's call for a total working class movement boycott of all these Tory cheap labour schemes. We must not touch Tecs or the schemes they administer.

SINGLE PARENTS

There have been calls from some

right wing Tory rednecks for the government to place an obligation on single parent women claimants to always reveal who is the father of their child. There are 1.1 million single parent families in Britain, 90% headed by women and 53% dependent on benefit claimants. This is yet another attack on this vulnerable group. We demand unrestricted access for single parents to a decent level of benefits, with no obligations to reveal details of their personal lives.

POVERTY IN EUROPE

The Tories have clashed with the European Commission over plans for a five year programme to measure and assist the growing number of poor throughout the EC. What is worrying the government particularly is that Commission is seeking to set an EC-wide definition of poverty. Why? Obviously, if there were a standard yard-stick against which to measure the poverty levels of member states, the myth of Britain's 'economic miracle' would be cruelly exposed.

YTS 'DEATH LETTER'

Senior civil servants have drawn up a ghastly standard letter to be sent to the parents of teenagers killed on YTS. And no wonder they are feeling the need to provide this type of *pro forma* document: the accident rate among 'trainees' on the two year YTS rose sharply between 1985 and 1988. Four years ago it stood at an annual average of 59 per 100,000 'trainees', rising to 136 accidents per 100,000. With the rate of exploitation on the government's cheap labour schemes set to rise and even the limited trade union supervision to be downgraded via the introduction of Tecs, this horrifying death rate will inevitably rise.

CONFUSION

One ploy of the government seems to have worked. Make the benefit rules as complicated as possible and you will keep down the level of claims. An incredible 65% or so of people entitled to Family Credit - the state benefit aimed at poor

working families - are still failing to receive what is due to them.

UWC ACTION

• **Central London Meetings:** Every Monday 8pm at the Diorama Arts Centre, 18 Park Square East, NW1 (tube: Regents Park or Great Portland Street):

February 26: The second Labour government (1929) and the unemployed.

March 5: Trades Councils and the fight to organise the unemployed.

March 12: The unemployed petition to parliament, 1932.

(**March 19:** Public meeting in Conway Hall)

March 26: Organising meeting for lobby.

UWC Petition against ET, YTS and the "actively seeking work" clause. Collect signatures and cash for the UWC. Send SAE for 6 petition sheets. UWC needs £500 per week!

Unemployed Organiser No6: Bulk prices including postage: 8 for £1; 100 plus at 10 for £1.

SERIOUS MONEY

Spending beyond our means in the run up to the UWC's march and lobby of the 1989 TUC put the UWC into financial difficulties and seriously delayed publication of *Unemployed Organiser* No6. This must not be allowed to happen again. Money must be raised before it is spent. We are now aiming to produce *Unemployed Organiser* every two months at a cost of roughly £500 per issue, at the same time as working off our current total debt of £2,952 as quickly as possible, and meeting running costs such as advertisements, meeting rooms, leaflets, placards, telephone and administration. Publication of *UO* has been made possible because London comrades are now raising £500 per month, mainly from streetwork. Can other areas add to this? Regular street and workplace collections must be supplemented by winning many more labour movement organisations to affiliate, and to sponsor our September 1990 march and lobby with a donation.

MODEL MOTION

This organisation condemns the Government's recently introduced "Actively Seeking Work" clause and the effects it will have on the

unemployed. Like the Tories' previous cheap labour schemes, ET and YTS, the clause provides a further device for employers to exploit the unemployed and drive down the pay and standards of employed workers. All unemployed people should be offered proper training schemes with proper trade union rates of pay, and should not be forced onto schemes where they will be used as a cheap source of labour.

This organisation therefore resolves:

1) to sponsor the UWC's Manchester to Blackpool march and lobby of the TUC in September 1990 and to donate £50 to aid its build-up;

2) to order and circulate among the branch membership bulk copies of *Unemployed Organiser* and the UWC petition to the TUC.

3) to affiliate to the Unemployed Workers Charter (National organisations £100pa, local organisations £25pa).

WELCOME



The UWC has recently asked Ernie Roberts to be our honorary president following the death of our former president, Jack Dash, and we were more than pleased when he accepted.

Ernie has been active within the workers' movement all his life and initially established a name for himself in the National Unemployed Workers Movement as its Midlands organiser from 1932 to the outbreak of the second world war.

Since then Ernie has been a shop steward in many factories, becoming Coventry District President of the AEU for eight years and assistant general secretary of the AEU for over 20 years. For nine years he was a Coventry City Councillor and was elected as MP for Hackney North in 1979 and 1983.

We look forward to working with our new honorary president, and we believe his past experience, especially in the NUWM and the trade union movement, will provide a valuable asset to the UWC's work.

SUICIDE

The suicide of Michael Rostron from Blackburn in Lancs last September highlights the pressures faced by the unemployed, and also the dirty hypocrisy of the media's treatment of their plight. On September 8, Rostron was refused a housing benefit cheque worth £22.03; he returned to the housing benefit office two hours later, poured petrol over the floor and set fire to it. Three housing officers were injured in the blaze, one subsequently died from the 70% burns he received. Rostron was cornered the next day by police and he jumped to his death from a sixth floor balcony.

The suicide rate among young men has risen 70% since 1982 and unemployment is a major contributory factor in this. Without hope, without the type of fighting alternative provided by the UWC, people like Rostron turn their anger in on themselves. We are in business to provide hope to desperate and angry people like Michael Rostron.

MANCHESTER

Reports in the *Manchester Evening News*, one of the country's largest circulation local dailies, show that Manchester has the lowest take up rate for ET in the country. Jack Cummins, for Manchester UWC, pointed out that this statistic must be, at least in part, due to the work of UWC comrades in the area. "We have distributed literally thousands of copies of *Unemployed Organiser* on the dole queues", he pointed out. "Our mass work has had a noticeable effect on the unemployed in Manchester. Our presence on the dole queues and the discussions and arguments we have had, have been key in giving the unemployed the confidence and the arguments to reject what they already see as slave labour. Now we plan to turn that mass influence into mass organisation. It's hard, but that is the next stage."

HITTING THE HOMELESS

Recent statistics have revealed to what extent the changes to the benefit rules introduced in 1985 have hit the homeless. Bed and breakfast has virtually disappeared as a temporary source of accommodation. Since 1985 and the changes, the number of cheap hotels which would accept claimants and have charges which fall within the DSS's farcically low limit of £48.30 a week has fallen from 58 to just 15. Thousands have consequently been forced onto the streets.

35 HOURS

Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions negotiators claimed a major breakthrough when, after 100 hours of talks, British Aerospace, the largest and most intransigent employer in the Engineering Employers' Federation, offered, in two stages, a 37 hour, four day week at their Preston plant. The manual workers' mass meeting on February 13, however, overwhelmingly rejected the offer by 2,000 votes to 20. Workers objected to upping the rate of exploitation through 'job flexibility' and loss of tea breaks, and stood firm in solidarity with the 600 white collar strikers at Preston, for whom the deal offered little. The rank and file showed their determination to fight on.

THE BATTLE AGAINST THE "NOT GENUINELY SEEKING WORK" CLAUSE

The "Not Genuinely Seeking Work" clause of the 1927 Unemployment Insurance Act was not implemented until early 1927 and throughout the year it was applied with ever increasing viciousness, until thousands of unemployed men every week were being deprived of benefit. Under this clause, it was not up to the authorities to provide proof that the claimant was not searching for a job; it was up to the claimant to provide documentary proof that he was.

There had to be evidence of dates, times and places of applications in the form of letters or notes from employers and their representatives.

Even when some documentary evidence was available the Court of Referees who adjudicated the claimant's case could still withhold benefit on the pretext that the claimant was not assiduous enough in his efforts; that is, he hadn't made enough applications or hadn't presented his request for work with sufficient conviction and vigour, or even worse, had insisted on the rate for the job.

The referees were making these adverse decisions when at the same time they knew only too well the problems claimants would face in obtaining proof from employers who were fed up with the constant pestering they were receiving from continual streams of men seeking jobs. Quite often the job seeker would not even be able to get past the factory gate let alone speak to anyone with sufficient authority to sign a note.

In his book, *Unemployed Struggles*, Wal Hannington writes of instances of men walking from Halifax to Huddersfield. This was being done by men who knew very well that no work was available in either town. They were merely trying to collect enough evidence to prove they were actively seeking work.

An old friend of mine, Joe Ormerod, who was around the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) long before I was, told me of one of his own experiences of that dark time. One morning he set off from his home in Collyhurst, Manchester intend-

ing to walk all the way to Bolton if necessary, a round trip of over 26 miles.

He had already walked quite a distance by the time he reached the main Manchester to Bolton road at Salford when it started to rain, a steady drizzle, damp and miserable enough to deter anyone – especially someone attired as Joe was. He had no top coat, only a thin thread-bare jacket and his shoes had holes in. He had already called at a number of workplaces and had met with no success. So, despite the miserable weather, Joe decided to keep going.

By the time he reached the halfway mark at Pendlebury he was wet through. By then, though, he had managed to obtain four notes: the first from a sympathetic foreman at an engineering factory; the second from an even more sympathetic owner of a small furniture manufacturers; then a letter from the manager of Pendleton Co-op; and, finally, a scribbled note from the ganger on a building site.

Joe, feeling that this indeed was his lucky day, decided to keep

going. After all, with this type of luck, he reasoned, he could even achieve a miracle and actually find a job. As he trudged on his way through Pendleton the rain worsened and changed to a heavy downpour. Joe searched through his pockets, making sure he had enough coppers to pay for a cup of tea and slice of toast.

He made his way to a nearby cafe. Inside the cafe, glad to be out of the rain, he looked around and seeing a figure attired in a similar way to himself and equally as wet and bedraggled, recognising a fellow human in a similar predicament to his own, moved across to his table. They were soon swapping experiences and Joe's guess proved to be correct. The other man, Billy Dawson, was from Bolton and had turned out that morning prepared to walk all the way to Salford or even Manchester.

Unfortunately, Billy had met with no success at all, not even one note to prove he had been on this futile journey. It transpired that, like Joe, Billy was also a member

of the NUWM and they were soon discussing the new threat that the unemployed would be facing in the near future – The Thirty Stamp Rule.

This rule had first been placed on the statute book by the Labour government of 1924, but it was considered to be so repressive that not only that government but the one that succeeded it, a Tory government, was hesitant to impose it. But it had remained on the statute books and now Baldwin's Tories had decided to use it. What this new rule would mean in effect was that in order to qualify for benefit the unemployed would have to show thirty stamp contributions during the preceding two years, in contrast to the rule then operating that only eight contributions for the previous year and thirty stamps at any time since work had been commenced, would be sufficient.

Eric Blair

(to be continued)

JOIN UP!

I wish to become a UWC member. Enclosed:

£2 (unwaged) ☐
£5 (waged) ☐

My organisation wishes to affiliate to the UWC.

I enclose £25 (local organisation) ☐
£100 (national organisation) ☐

I/My organisation wish/es to sponsor the UWC's
September 1990 march and lobby of the TUC ☐

I/We enclose a donation of £

Please send _____ copies of UO No6. I enclose £

Please send _____ copies of the next UO
and invoice me ☐

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____ Organisation _____

The Unemployed Workers Charter says:

- Work at trade union rates or full maintenance for the unemployed at the average level of pay
- Smash ET and YTS – for real training at trade union rates
- Stop harassment of the unemployed. Claiming benefit is a right, not a crime. Smash the "actively seeking work" clause
- End all unnecessary overtime work with no loss of pay. For a 35 hour week.
- Unemployed workers groups should have representation on trades councils and the TUC. A national unemployed workers' movement is needed to be the voice of the unemployed
- Build a fighting unity between employed and unemployed workers